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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAL](#) [EAID](#) [IS](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: MIDDLE EAST: RUSSIAN MFA'S INITIAL REACTION TO  
PRESIDENT'S SPEECH

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells. Reasons: 1.4(B/D)

1. (C) The MFA's initial, informal reaction to the President's July 16 speech on the Middle East was positive, with particular GOR interest in the President's call for an international meeting on the Middle East. MFA Deputy Director for the Middle East Peace Process Oleg Ozerov told us July 17 that he was in the process of writing recommendations for the Foreign Minister's use at the July 19 Quartet meeting, but that the MFA unofficially welcomed the President's speech as a "good step in the right direction" because it would renew momentum on a peaceful settlement at a "difficult moment." In Ozerov's view, many of the initiatives in the speech mirrored Russian views on the steps needed to lay the groundwork for a comprehensive settlement.

2. (C) Ozerov said the GOR was particularly interested in the speech's reference to an international meeting, noting Russia's longstanding appeal for an international conference on the Middle East. He said the MFA's understanding was that the fall meeting called for in the speech which is to be chaired by the Secretary would be a preliminary meeting that would energize the parties to pursue serious talks. He said FM Lavrov was likely to seek clarity on the conference idea when the Quartet meets on February 19. Russia continued to support enlarging the discussion beyond Israel and the Palestinians to include Lebanese and Syrian tracks.

3. (C) Ozerov was quick to note that Russia continued to differ with the U.S. over the role of Hamas, stressing that Moscow would still seek to encourage reconciliation between it and Fatah. He argued that no political settlement would be tenable without Hamas. Key elements needed to move discussions with Israel forward -- reform of institutions and a reduction in violence -- depended on Hamas' agreement with Fatah. Russia was also concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and was weighing how to provide assistance without causing further instability or provoking any of the parties to the dispute. Reiterating standard Russian views, he argued that moderates in Hamas would push the group in a more moderate direction, but acknowledged that for now, more radical elements had been emboldened by their success in seizing Gaza.

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